



YoungStar

Frequently Asked Questions: Families

February 5, 2016

Note: Almost all questions have been revised since June 10, 2013; questions that have been substantially revised or added since the last update are highlighted.

YoungStar is a 5 Star quality rating and improvement system that supports child care and school-age care providers in the areas of education, learning environment & curriculum, business & professional practices and the health & well-being of children. Through this rating system the state addresses several key issues in Wisconsin's child care system. YoungStar:

- Focuses on improving outcomes for children by improving the overall quality of care
- Creates multiple pathways to professional development opportunities and better quality for child care and school-age programs
- Creates a clear, understandable tool for parents to choose quality child care
- Creates incentives and provides support for programs to improve services, particularly for low-income children
- Improves accountability for the Wisconsin Shares system

Questions: Families

(These questions are excerpted from the comprehensive YoungStar FAQ, and their numbers remain the same.)

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Answers Involving Families: Family Engagement and Wisconsin Shares

Family Engagement

FAM-1. How are families informed about YoungStar?

DCF works closely with partners to publicize YoungStar ratings using a variety of media in which families can learn about their child care options. The Department has also designed a website to assist those searching for child care or looking for more information on a specific child care program. The **Regulated Child Care and YoungStar Public Search** website provides detailed information about YoungStar ratings as well as compliance records for licensing and certification: <http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov>

To serve families, DCF collaborates with a broad range of partners to ensure that families are equipped with concrete, objective information regarding quality child care. Some of these partners are:

- Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies: <http://supportingfamilies.together.org/child-care-resource-referral-agencies/>
- Family Resource Centers: http://dcf.wi.gov/bmcw/family/resource_centers.htm
- Parents Plus: <http://parentspluswi.org/>
- County Agencies: http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/regional_operations/default.htm
- W-2 Programs: <http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/w2/directories.htm>
- Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://www.wiaap.org/>
- Job Centers: <http://www.wisconsinjobcenter.org/directory/>

The YoungStar marketing campaign also provides families with clear and consistent information about quality indicators in child care settings and about family involvement opportunities.

FAM-2. What is posted about child care programs on the DCF child care search website, and how does this help families select child care?

All regulated child care programs are listed on the website regardless of their participation in YoungStar. YoungStar participants also have detailed information provided about their star levels and the points they have earned in each of the four quality indicator areas during the YoungStar rating process. (In addition, families who receive Wisconsin Shares are notified periodically of their providers' ratings in YoungStar.)

Families selecting a YoungStar provider benefit from having objective ratings of licensed and certified child care programs, based on quality criteria that have been proven by research to indicate higher-quality programming and better outcomes for children.

¹ DCF's *Regulated Child Care and YoungStar Public Search* website helps families search for safe, quality child care in Wisconsin: <http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov/Search/BasicSearch.aspx>

Wisconsin Shares Child Care Subsidy Program

SHARES-1. What is Wisconsin Shares, and how is it related to YoungStar?

Wisconsin Shares is Wisconsin's child care subsidy program that helps families pay for child care. To receive Wisconsin Shares payments, providers must participate in YoungStar.

To promote quality in child care, Wisconsin ties the rate of Wisconsin Shares reimbursement to the level of child care quality (as indicated by the provider's star level) as follows:

- 5 Stars = Wisconsin Shares payments increased by 25%
- 4 Stars = Wisconsin Shares payments increased by 10%
- 3 Stars = Wisconsin Shares payments will remain the same
- 2 Stars = Wisconsin Shares payments decreased by 5%
- 1 Star = Provider is not eligible for Wisconsin Shares payments

Note: Any increase or decrease in Wisconsin Shares reimbursement rate due to the YoungStar rating is applied **after** the parent co-payment is taken out of the Wisconsin Shares payment.

Wisconsin Shares information and resources for parents and providers are provided at:

- YoungStar and Wisconsin Shares: http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/wi_shares.htm
- "Wisconsin Shares" Child Care Subsidy Program: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/wishares/default.htm>

SHARES-2. Do programs serving children who receive Wisconsin Shares have a choice about participating in YoungStar? Do programs participating in YoungStar have a choice about serving children who receive Wisconsin Shares?

In order to participate in Wisconsin Shares, child care programs **must** be in regulatory compliance and **must** participate in YoungStar. YoungStar ratings are thus **required** for all programs receiving Wisconsin Shares child care subsidies. If a program is in regulatory compliance, the program may choose to have a YoungStar Automated Rating. With an Automated Rating, a program would not receive an on-site observation, and the highest star level they could attain would be 2 Star.

Also, in order to participate in YoungStar, the program **must** agree to accept children who utilize Wisconsin Shares. Programs that sign a YoungStar Contract must be willing to:

- Accept children receiving Wisconsin Shares
- Comply with the contract they have signed with DCF and with Licensing/Certification
- Have an annual YoungStar rating

The YoungStar Contract lasts one year. During the contract period, the rating is published on the YoungStar public child care search website:

<http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov>

Sometimes a program happens to have no children enrolled who receive Wisconsin Shares. These programs may *volunteer* to be rated through YoungStar, as long as they agree to accept any children utilizing Wisconsin Shares in the future.

A program may withdraw from YoungStar only if the program has not received any Wisconsin Shares payments within 6 months of its withdrawal request. If the program has received Wisconsin Shares

payments within the last 6 months, the program cannot withdraw and must remain on the YoungStar public child care search website.

SHARES-3. How do programs receive their Wisconsin Shares reimbursement adjustments?

Wisconsin Shares tiered reimbursement adjustments are processed automatically and added to (or deducted from) the Wisconsin Shares check already being issued to providers. These adjustments are labeled as “YoungStar amount.”

SHARES-4. Do Wisconsin Shares tiered reimbursement adjustments affect the amount a program charges parents?

YoungStar does not regulate or direct provider prices or parent payments (whether a parent is making a private payment or a Wisconsin Shares co-payment), regardless of program ratings and corresponding tiered reimbursement adjustments. Programs are expected to continue to collect full family co-payments and can use their own discretion when choosing how to manage the increase or decrease in payments based on their YoungStar ratings. Increased reimbursement is intended to support higher quality programming.

As for prices, child care programs are owner-operated and determine their own fee structure. Programs should determine the actual business costs of providing the quality of care delivered. Funding sources should be reviewed, and costs should be prorated over the number of children being served. Marketing, business climate, eligibility for private funding sources, eligibility for public funding sources, and strategic planning are all things to consider in setting prices.

The YoungStar rating can be an important marketing tool for child care programs that have earned higher ratings, as parents are encouraged to choose programs that have demonstrated quality practices by earning points within YoungStar.

SHARES-5. When a program receives a reimbursement adjustment, are there specifications on how that money can be used?

No. The program may use the quality incentive payments as it sees fit.

Answers about YoungStar Evaluation Criteria: Child Health & Well-Being and Business Practices

(These questions are excerpted from the comprehensive YoungStar FAQ, and their numbers remain the same.)

BUS-5. If I use parent satisfaction surveys, can I receive a YoungStar point for Family Involvement?

Family surveys *alone* (with no follow-up) would *not* earn you a point. Using the results of a family survey and developing family involvement opportunities that reflect the needs of children and their families can help you earn points within the Business and Professional Practices indicator area. Specific policies and practices that reflect parental input into the program’s operations play a key role in the determination of points awarded. You can learn about these specific policies and practices (and the number that need to be in place to earn 1 or 2 points) in the *YoungStar Evaluation Criteria*:

Family: http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-family.pdf

Group: http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-group.pdf

School-Age:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-schoolage.pdf

Day Camps:

http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov/youngstar/pdf/evaluation_criteria/2016_eval_criteria/2016-ys-evaluation-criteria-daycamp.pdf

H&W-6. What courses count for the Strengthening Families/Darkness to Light Training indicator (D.1.4)?

Below is a list of courses that are accepted for this YoungStar point:

50% of the staff and the Director have one of the Registry-verified trainings/equivalencies listed below

- Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education: Building Protective Factors with Families
- Family Service Credential
- Touchpoints Birth to Three: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development
- Development-approved equivalent that demonstrates knowledge of protective factors

Director and an individual from every classroom must have one of the Registry-verified trainings listed below

- Darkness to Light (administered by a *PDAS-approved trainer*—a trainer approved by the Professional Development Approval System)
- Completion of course 10-307-167 ECE: Health, Safety, and Nutrition at a WI Technical College

For ratings occurring on or after January 1, 2016, YoungStar will no longer accept Department-approved Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (CANP) training to meet the requirements of indicator D.1.4. Programs that earned a point for D.1.4 due to having 100% of Lead Teachers/Director with CANP training will no longer earn that point when they are rated in the 2016 rating year unless the program has staff with qualifications to meet the other training options in indicator D.1.4.

Answers about Regulatory Compliance

(These questions are excerpted from the comprehensive YoungStar FAQ, and their numbers remain the same.)

REG-1. What is regulated child care?

“Regulated” means child care is either:

- Certified by the County/Tribe or Milwaukee Early Care Administration (MECA),
- Licensed by the State, **or**
- Operated by a public school board.

Note: To be reimbursed with Wisconsin Shares funds, providers must be regulated.

Licensed Child Care

Under Wisconsin law, no person may provide care and supervision for four or more children under the age of 7 for less than 24 hours a day unless that person obtains a license to operate a child care program from DCF. This does **not** include:

- A relative or guardian of a child who provides care and supervision for the child
- A public or parochial school
- A person employed to come to the home of the child's parent or guardian for less than 24 hours a day
- A county, city, village, town, public school district, or library that provides programs primarily intended for recreational or social purposes

There are 3 different categories of state licensed child care:

- Licensed Family Child Care Centers provide care for up to eight children. This care is usually in the provider's home.
- Licensed Group Child Care Centers provide care for nine or more children. These centers are usually located somewhere other than a residence and may be small or large in size.
- Licensed Day Camps are seasonal programs that provide experiences for four or more children. These programs usually operate in an outdoor setting.

Find more information on DCF Child Care Licensing at:

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/licensed/About.htm>

Certified Child Care

There is a *voluntary* form of regulation in Wisconsin for those child care programs that are not required to be licensed. This type of regulation is called certification. Counties/Tribes certify child care homes and some school-age child care programs. Certified care is available for those families who wish to receive a child care subsidy, but who do not choose to use licensed care.

Find more information on DCF Child Care Certification at:

<http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/certification/default.htm>

Exempt from Regulation

Public and private schools that operate early childhood programs are exempt from licensing oversight. These programs are regulated by public school boards and are required to meet the state child care licensing *standards*, even though they are not required to be officially licensed.

Care in the child's own home is also exempt.

Note: Programs operated by private or parochial schools must be licensed in order to receive payments from the Wisconsin Shares Subsidy Program.

REG-5. What should families consider when reviewing a program's regulatory history?

In reviewing the regulatory history of a program, families should keep in mind that the presence of violations and enforcement actions in the program's regulatory history is not the whole story. It is rare to

find a regulated program that has never been cited for a rule violation. Many factors can influence a regulatory history, including the size of the program, the length of time the program has been operating, and the qualifications of the staff. Families should consider some of the following questions when they review the program's regulatory history:

- a. What is the YoungStar rating?
- b. What is the nature of the violation? Was the violation related to safety, record keeping, staff-to-child ratios? Every rule is important to the quality of the program, but some rules are more directly related to the safety of children.
- c. Is the program being repeatedly cited for the same violation? What is the program doing to correct the violation? Is the program making timely efforts to correct the violation?
- d. Is there an extensive history of multiple violations, or are the violations infrequent?
- e. What enforcement actions (for licensed programs only) have been taken and for what reasons? How has the licensed program responded to these actions?
- f. What do other families say about the program?
- g. What is the program's plan of correction? What can the program tell families about the violations and plans to correct them?

Tips for Choosing Child Care was developed by DCF to help families make the very important decision of locating a child care arrangement that is right for them. DCF encourages families to consider this guidance, in combination with the information available through YoungStar, when considering the program that best meets the needs of their children, as well as their own family needs.

- *Tips for Choosing Child Care*: <http://dcf.wisconsin.gov/childcare/licensed/Choosing.htm>
- YoungStar Information: <http://youngstar.wi.gov>

DCF also encourages families to talk with the programs they are considering. Families may also contact the local Child Care Resource and Referral office:

<http://supportingfamilies.together.org/member-directory/>

REG-10. Why doesn't DCF's Child Care Search² display positive observations made by the regulators?

The role of DCF is to protect the health, safety and welfare of Wisconsin's children in care through periodic monitoring of child care programs. DCF licensing specialists and certifying agencies conduct regular inspections of regulated programs to assure compliance with administrative rule requirements, the minimal standards established through statutory requirements. The expectation is that regulated programs meet these minimum standards at all times. The website shows the compliance information collected at these monitoring visits.

YoungStar ratings, however, provide the consumer with information on the *quality* of care being provided to children, based on an assessment of the program's education qualifications and training, learning environment and curriculum, business and professional practices, and child health and well-being practices.

DCF recognizes that many child care programs go well beyond the minimum standards required to maintain licensure or certification. We encourage child care programs to publicize their many extra efforts to provide quality early care in a safe and nurturing environment. Families looking for child care are encouraged to visit the programs they are considering to see firsthand what each program has to offer.

² DCF's *Regulated Child Care and YoungStar Public Search* website helps families search for safe, quality child care in Wisconsin: <http://childcarefinder.wisconsin.gov/Search/BasicSearch.aspx>